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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000078

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SUNNI LEADERS EXPRESS THEIR ANGER OVER KILLINGS

REF: A) BASRAH 35 B) BASRAH 54

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,
State Department.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 14 2006, the Regional Coordinator (RC), Deputy RC and Poloff attended a meeting with six prominent Sunni leaders at the diwan at the Al Abayachi mosque of Sheik Khalid al-Mulla, a moderate Sunni imam and a close contact of the Regional Embassy Office (see Ref. A). The Sunni leaders voiced their strong dissatisfaction with the lack of security for Sunnis in Basrah. The Sunnis leaders blamed the local government and coalition forces for failing to prevent four recent murders in the Sunni community (ref B). Threatening to hold a press conference with international media to stress the responsibility of the coalition and the local government for not preventing the murders of their co-religionists, the leaders said that only immediate and effective actions by coalition forces would prevent this media event. After a long discussion, the Sunni leaders agreed to pursue a joint meeting with coalition diplomats and military commanders to review efforts to protect the Sunni community. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Sunni leaders in attendance included the following: Sheikh Khalid al-Mulla, host of the meeting and imam of the Al Abayachi mosque, Sheik Mohammed Zaki Abid al-Majeed al-Hamdani, leader of the Al-Hamdan tribe, Sheik Adnan Majeed al-Ghanim, leader of the Al-Ghanim tribe, Sheik Yousif Abid al-Majeed al-Hamdani, imam of the Al-Sager mosque, Sheik Mohammed Abid al-Hashim, imam of the Hamdan Bridge Mosque, and Sheik Abid al-Karim Nassir, head of the Sunni Endowment. The six Sunni leaders claimed to represent one million Sunnis.

¶3. (C) Sheik Khalid opened the meeting with a welcoming statement, and the RC expressed his condolences for the recent murders of Sunnis including Sheik Khalid's friend, Sheik Khalil Jaber Abdul Ali, and his eleven-year-old son who were assassinated on May 12 in front of the Al-Khudairi mosque in Basrah. These killings followed the assassination of two other Sunni leaders, Sheik Khalid Abdullah Jarad al-Saadon and Tarik Ali Sultan on May 10 in Al Zubair.

¶4. (C) Sheik Adnan, the leader of a Sunni tribal association in Basrah, immediately questioned the benefit of MNF-I forces in Basrah and inquired whether they were stationed there to

maintain safety or were strictly for show. He said that assassinations against Sunnis in Basrah were increasing at an alarming rate. He expressed his intention to raise international awareness of the "inaction" by the local government and coalition forces by holding a press conference with international media in which blame would be placed squarely upon the United States, United Kingdom and the local government.

The only way to avoid the condemnation of coalition forces in front of the media, Sheik Adnan said, would be if immediate action were taken to guarantee the safety of Sunnis. Per Sheik Adnan the Sunni community planned to set up a camp for their people in the desert, away from the city, where they could be protected. The Sheiks did not elaborate on how this camp would be protected and who would protect it. Placing much of the blame for the killings on Basrah Governor Muhammad al-Wa'eli and his brother Ismail, Sheik Adnan said that the time for words is over and quick action to protect the Sunni population is needed.

15. (C) Sheik Zaki al-Hamdani, a tribal leader and imam from Abu Khassib, said that the nerves of the members of his tribe are frayed and most Sunnis are afraid to go to the hospital or other public places. He described in grisly detail the torture and murder of Sunnis in Basrah (see Ref. B for more on the killings). He said that Sunnis "have no problems with Shias" and only want to be able to live a normal life in the neighborhoods where they have dwelled for hundreds of years.

16. (C) The other Sunni leaders echoed Sheik Adnan and Sheik Zaki's concerns and warned that Sunni landowners would send their families to the camp in the desert and then would fight to protect their property. Sheik Nassir, the head of the Sunni Endowment, along with Sheik Khalid, were the only leaders who said that further dialogue with coalition forces was possible, but Sheik Nassir warned that it is imperative to make immediate and tangible efforts to improve security since "people are being killed like insects."

17. (C) To address the concerns of the Sunni leaders, the RC

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proposed a meeting of American, British and Danish diplomats and military commanders to exchange information and review the current security situation for Sunnis. In a subsequent meeting with RC and DRC the acting UK Consul General, agreed to such a meeting. The head of the Danish office is on leave. The goal would be to review concrete steps that are being taken by coalition forces and to consider what else could be done to stop the killings. After having vented their frustrations and anger, the Sunni leaders concurred that a meeting would be useful. The meeting closed with an agreement by both sides that we would move forward together on organizing the meeting.

18. (C) Comment: The meeting highlighted smoldering rage and a feeling of impotence by the Sunni leaders as murders of Sunnis in Basrah continue. All agreed that immediate action - by someone -- is needed to alleviate the suffering of the Sunni community. In addition, they faulted the Governor for not taking the necessary measures to protect Sunnis. Although several of the leaders were adamant that they had had enough of meetings that produced nothing, at the end they all agreed that the only way to move forward is through dialogue with MNF-I diplomats and military commanders. REO believe these Sunnis leaders are as influential as they claim and that they legitimately speak for the Basrah Sunni community. However, the emotion expressed at the diwan clearly indicates that the Sunni community soon will take independent action to protect themselves if further discussions do not yield results quickly. End Comment.
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